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ABSTRACT

Provided is the transcript of Part III of a five-part series on gifted children in the schools, presented by Options in Education -- a weekly radio broadcast devoted to coverage on news, features, policy, and people in the field of education on National Public Radio. The topic "What to Do with the Gifted Child at School" is covered with an introduction; comments by gifted students; and a discussion of such issues as attitudes, teacher role, skill development, teaching methods, and demographic factors. Among participants listed are such artists, educators, and experts as B. Boston, L. Senesh, R. May, S. Starr, and D. Treffinger. (IM)

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INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP
THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

PROGRAM #29
THE GIFTED AND TALENTED
No. 3 of 5

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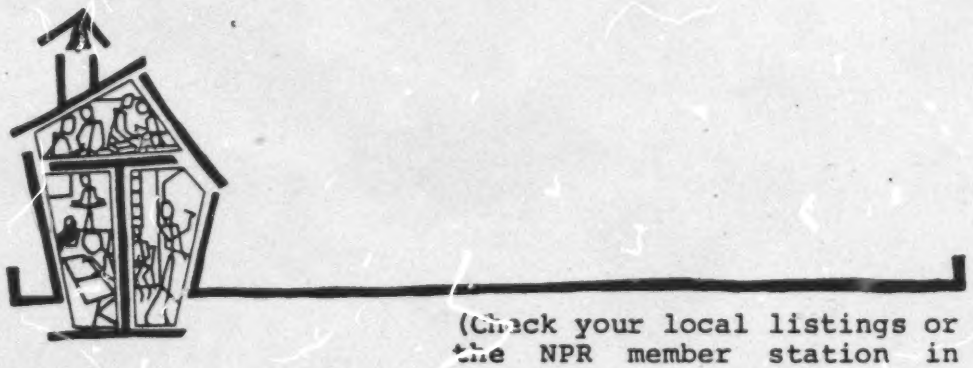

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(OPENING THEME)

BLAIR: I'm Wendy Blair with NPR's OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

(MUSIC)

OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a news magazine about all the issues in education -- from the ABC's of preschool to the alphabet soup of government programs. If you've ever been to school, we have something that will interest you.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. On this edition of OPTIONS IN EDUCATION: What Do You Do With a Gifted Child in a Classroom?

> DR. BOSTON: One of the things that we're perfectly willing to accord a professor in a university is the absolute right to go into the university library and follow his nose wherever it leads him, but we are not willing to accord the same right to a 14-year-old child.
>
> DR. SENESH: You may find that it is a more efficient way to teach children, in terms of knowledge. What they are losing is the social context and the responsibility to those who are not as hoity toity as the gifted children are.

MERROW: Those two professors sum up the debate. Earlier in this series of programs on Gifted and Talented Children we heard that fewer than one in twenty gifted students is ever identified by our educational system. And, that of those few who are identified, only about 25% receive special education. It's estimated that there are over two and a half million gifted school children in America. The advocates of gifted child education call them this nation's most precious and most wasted resource. That's what this series is all about.

(MUSIC FROM PETER PAN)

BLAIR: Now, Peter Pan is a gifted child who could be a real problem. Teachers often know who the really bright students are, but they don't always know what to do with them. A lot depends on what amount of flexible time and money schools have. People like famed psychologist Bruno Bettleheim told us to leave gifted students alone -- just show them where the library is and they'll succeed. If they don't, then they're not really gifted after all.

MERROW: Other educators say it's not that simple. In fact, they say that some gifted may hide their genius in an effort to avoid being different -- to be popular with their fellow students. Others may become frustrated and wind up as disciplinary problems for their teachers and distractions for their classmates. Special programs are necessary, educators of the gifted say, or talents will diminish and be lost.

BLAIR: Ask gifted students themselves about these issues and you'll find they don't agree either.

> STUDENT: When I was in the eighth grade, I had a teacher who had just graduated from college. She was a very dynamic teacher and she really got all the kids interested, not just the so-called brighter students

of the grade. She turned me on to science and then when I got into high school, I'd gotten a lot of encouragement. And, you know, like sometimes when you get frustrated, as I suppose all people do, they kind of give you the little push that makes you go on.

STUDENT: There are some bad things about the ordinary student-teacher relationship, and one of these is that our culture says it should be from above to below. And I don't really think this is conducive to learning.

STUDENT: There's always going to be those that are brighter and those that are not so bright, and then the average. And it's important to keep this balance. It's on the same principle, at least to me, as the balance of nature. That's exactly what it is, so you have to keep those brighter kids there, because they add to the education of the less-bright students. They kind of will push them on, but yet you can't take away the opportunities for the gifted students. They need that extra . . .

STUDENT: Bright students need a way of learning that challenges them more, that permits them to be more independent. The bright student usually doesn't want to be tied down to a routine. Some people see this as a lack of discipline. And I think today we tend to go to one of two extremes. We either have a completely sort of selecting from mediocrity situation where there are visible or invisible penalties for trying to do anything special. Or we have a very rigid track 1, track 2, track 3, and this is the bright group, and this is the dumb group type situation. And I think these opposite situations tend to polarize and it's very hard for educators to develop the middle ground.

BLAIR: It's a complex issue. Maybe no middle ground exists, especially for the classroom teacher facing large numbers of students and small numbers in the education budget. But before you make up your mind, let's hear more of the argument. John spoke with Dr. Bruce Boston recently at the Council for Exceptional Children Meeting in Chicago.

DR. BRUCE BOSTON

DR. BRUCE BOSTON: It's awfully tough for a young teacher who's in a junior high school as a math teacher to discover that in her class or his class there is a child who knows more mathematics than he or she does. Very often the way this behavior is exhibited on the part of the child comes across in ways that, unless the teacher is trained to understand it and to look for it, come across as disruptive behavior, smart-aleck behavior. A kid can make a teacher look bad. I mean, a kid who sits there and tells the teacher that there's an easier way to do this problem or there is a better way to set up this research project -- I'm using a facetious example -- but this kind of thing happens quite a bit.

Also, I think a teacher of gifted children has to be someone who is very open to and responsive to and not threatened by change. If you go into a classroom of gifted kids, one of the things that strikes you is that there is a relatively high level of chaos, or what seems to be chaos. The classroom of gifted children is not a

neat, orderly row-on-row of desks with kids listening attentively to the teacher. The teacher of gifted children is more than anything else, I think, a broker, rather than an instructor, able to match up the child with the resources that the child needs in order to do what the child wants to do, finds interesting to do, is capable of, wants to explore, or whatever.

MERROW: Does structure in a classroom really work against the needs of gifted kids? I've read that a number of times.

BOSTON: Depends on the kind of structure. All learning has a structure of some kind or another. The structure that we are most accustomed to is a transmissive structure, even an authoritarian structure. That kind of structure is not particularly conducive, I don't think, to the education of gifted children.

MERROW: Maybe to the education of anybody.

BOSTON: Or to the education of anybody; as long as we're making wild indictments of American education, we might as well go ahead and say that. Sheer data is probably the least important thing that comes into the education of gifted children. That kind of thing is just absorbed along the way.

MERROW: The goal would not be assimilating a lot of knowledge about the Civil War.

BOSTON: No, it wouldn't be. The goal may be in this instance the development of research skills.

MERROW: Certainly you have to argue that there is a need for some kind of discipline for toughening mental muscles or something like that which would require figuring out a course and staying on the damn course, no?

BOSTON: Oh, certainly. At some point, there has to be some kind of coalescence of information, skills, processes into the production of knowledge.

What we have done is we have taken all this kind of data and we've put it into various boxes. Now, what the gifted child does very often is that he just doesn't pay any attention to the boxes. He cuts across them. He cuts through them. He skips over them. And it appears to be a much more haphazard kind of thing. And sometimes it is and sometimes it isn't.

One of the things that we're perfectly willing to accord a professor in a university is the absolute right to go into the university library and follow his nose wherever it leads him, in terms of research or a project that he's interested in, or whatever. But we are not willing to accord the same right to a 14-year-old child. Well, you know, the professor has earned the right. Well, yes he has. I'm not so sure that that right has to be earned in that way. You don't necessarily have to have a ticket called Ph.D. to have that right. It may come simply by right.

BLAIR: Not everyone accepts Dr. Bruce Boston's argument that gifted children have a right to follow their own intellectual inclinations independently without the traditional classroom structure. College teacher Dr. Lawrence Senesh, a Professor of Economics at the University of Colorado, sharply disagrees.

DR. LAWRENCE SENESH

DR. LAWRENCE SENESH: I strongly feel that gifted children should have a challenge, should be offered a challenge in the classroom. But, on the other hand, I strongly feel that this challenge has to be offered in a class with mixed capabilities, because the gifted children have to feel that they are members of a total society. And the classroom is a society miniature.

MERROW: What about the argument that gifted children, in fact, do better when they are segregated, that it's a synergistic kind of thing that they teach each other?

SENESH: Yes, I think it is important that gifted children should, just as every child in a classroom, be utilized to their maximum potentialities, so the gifted children can be used as peer instructors to the slower learners.

The danger is — you always have to measure cost and benefit. You may find that it is a more efficient way to teach children in terms of knowledge. But what they are losing is the social context and the responsibility to those who are not as hoity toity as the gifted children are.

Actually, you are developing an aristocracy in the United States who are losing contact with the community. Almost you are developing a kind of a cut-flower civilization.

MERROW: What do you mean a cut-flower civilization?

SENESH: A cut-flower civilization is when the gifted child is suddenly placed in an ideal dehydrated atmosphere and cut off from the rest of the community, and it becomes an elite group. And an elite group which will never have sensitivity for the problem of society and for the problem of those whose problem has to be solved, thus promoting general welfare.

MERROW: But we already have an aristocracy of wealth in this country. Wouldn't we be better served if we had an aristocracy of talent?

SENESH: No, I do not feel, because an aristocracy has to be always serving the general public, but to serve the general public, to recognize social problems, to recognize social reality, to see the life as a system at large, you have to be during your formative years in steady contact with children from all backgrounds.

MERROW: You're saying in effect that the smarter kids should be teaching the kids who are less able. It's each-one-teach-one kind of thing, but doesn't that get in the way of a kid's developing his or her fullest mental ability?

SENESH: No, I do not think. I am now -- I don't know how many years a teacher — and whenever I am in contact with a classroom I am enriching myself. This is the marvelous challenge to teach, that at the end of the hour when I leave my classroom, I'm just as much enriched as the children are enriched. This is one of those propositions that both the children and the teacher benefit. Or in this case, the less talented and the more talented both are benefiting, because the teaching involves all of this -- clarification of ideas. And the clarification of ideas is needed very badly by the gifted child, as well as the less gifted.

So, you see, the children are working as a team. And I would never tell the gifted child that he's doing more important work than the less gifted child.

MERROW: But, above all, keep those gifted children in the classroom with all the other children?

SENESH: Never to be segregated, never.

BLAIR: Professor Lawrence Senesh of the University of Colorado. He spoke with John at a recent U.S. Office of Education meeting in Denver.

MERROW: Senesh believes that when students of different abilities work together, everyone benefits. But some gifted children don't feel all that cooperative and want to swim upstream against the current. And that's as it should be, according to Dr. Rollo May, Psychologist and author of "Love and Will." His newest book, "The Courage to Create," says that rebellion and creativity often occur simultaneously. He spoke with Reporter Connie Goldman.

DR. ROLLO MAY

DR. ROLLO MAY: Well, creative courage is the courage that is necessary to be like every real poet is -- a rebel against the status quo. And this makes the poet and the artist and the saint always a rebel. Now, this is what takes courage, not physical courage. They don't go around hitting everybody with a brick, but they are able, like most of us are not so much able, to listen to an inner vision and to speak it out, regardless of what it says.

GOLDMAN: Who did you write this book for -- for the person that's struggling with their own creativity or for society in general?

MAY: No, I did not write it for society in general. I am more concerned with the individual person. I wrote this for college students. And I wrote it to help them, the sophomores, juniors, seniors, who are struggling for some originality within themselves. I wrote it to help support them, to give them courage, if it can be given, so that they can listen to their own visions.

(MUSIC -- "Visions in the Mind")

BLAIR: If Dr. Rollo May is correct, creative children may need more individual attention. That's the best way, according to Dr. James Curry, who works with gifted children in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

DR. JAMES CURRY

DR. JAMES CURRY: The ideal relationship is one that is sharing, a co-learning opportunity in which the child and the teacher are able to share experiences and to discover them together.

MERROW: That sounds like you need almost a one-to-one kind of situation.

CURRY: That's ideal. And I have had that relationship with some of the students that I've had, particularly in Georgia. And those have been very lasting relationships and very important to me. Interestingly, Walter Barbe did a study.

MERROW: Who is he?

CURRY: Walter Barbe is the Editor of Highlight Magazine for children. And he did a study in his doctoral dissertation and asked students who had graduated from a gifted program thirty years earlier what was the most important thing to them. And forty percent of the girls and thirty-three percent of the boys said it was one person taking off the mask of authority and becoming a friend to them, recognizing their gifts, that made the difference. And so, as many as a person can handle, that's the type of benefit that they can bring about.

MERROW: The couple of interesting notions in terms of working with gifted children -- cliches that come up again, like the "early ripe, early rot" is one. Explain that.

CURRY: And the "cream rises to the top."

MERROW: Start with "early."

CURRY: Well, "early ripe, early rot" is the thought that if you have a second grader who can read on a fourth grade level, and you allow the child to read on the fourth grade level that pretty soon they'll burn out their potential. Somehow they'll top out. And yet, Terman's study, a longitudinal study that began in 1921 said that gifted students don't rot. They become gifted adults and they continue to excel and continue to advance, and so, it's just a false notion.

And the myth that "cream always rises to the top," we know that a lot of gifted kids drop out. Sixteen percent of gifted kids in one state became high school dropouts. In the State of California, Project Talent, they said that 25% of the girls that had high I.Q.'s in the top two and a half percent, after high school were doing nothing more than clerking and had no intentions of further education. We had this terrible talent loss.

MERROW: Children are not "bottles of milk."

CURRY: No - no, they really aren't.

MERROW: "Cannonball theory" -- I haven't heard that.

CURRY: The idea that you could no more stop a gifted child than you could a cannonball that had been shot out of a cannon, which is a beautiful metaphor, but it's not true. Unfortunately, gifted children are very subject to peer pressure and feelings of, you know, what does it mean to be different and what happens in schools to them.

MERROW: Talk about that peer pressure. I mean, what form does it take and how do gifted kids react -- they are pressured to be sort of normal?

CURRY: Yes, I think that Charlotte Malone, who is in San Diego, and a number of other people have studied this and have pointed out that gifted children become very conscious of the fact that they are excelling and they do a lot of work to hide their talents to just sort of become one with the rest of the group. And, unless they can see there's real value in who they are and what they can do, they are likely to try to hide those talents.

MERROW: So, they become one of the boys or one of the girls. So, they'll take part in smoking in the boys room and whatever acting out kinds of things go on.

CURRY: I have one fourth grade student that I work with, and teachers say that he makes a valiant attempt to be a better juvenile delinquent than anybody else. And because of his gift, he's sometimes successful, but he wants to be recognized for being one of the gang, and he tries desperately to become one of the gang, rather than saying "Hay, you know, I have this potential and I could do some neat things."

BLAIR: Dr. James Curry of Cedar Falls, Iowa.

MERROW: Curry's point about the one-to-one teacher-student relationship is well taken. But every school child could benefit from such a relationship, not just the ones with an I.Q. score of 130 or more. Classroom size is unfortunately a function of money, and the argument can be made that slower learners could make better use of a tutorial or mentor relationship with a teacher.

BLAIR: I bet a lot of people listening now, gifted or not, have lasting memories of a special teacher who cared especially about them. Here's Tom Leher's not-so-sentimental memory.

(MUSIC -- "Lobachevsky")

MERROW: Not all personal attention leads in such dubious directions. Anyway, gifted children may need extra intellectual resources and challenges. Can this be done in a typical classroom of students with mixed abilities? And who's going to figure out who is gifted and who is going to get special treatment if it becomes available? Each state is different, but most have very limited programs.

BLAIR: Charmaine Johnson may be representative of the situation in many places. She's a traveling teacher for all the gifted children in the Shawnee Mission District in Kansas. Most of her time is spent in putting out fires caused by gifted students with behavioral problems.

CHARMAINE JOHNSON

CHARMAINE JOHNSON: As our psychological teams come up with a problem, then they call me in for advice, strategy for the teachers' materials, things of this sort.

MERROW: So, the notion is that if a gifted kid can't adjust, then you call someone in to help that kid adjust so they can fit into the normal pattern?

JOHNSON: More to help the school adjust to the child somewhat. It's not that the child always has to make the adjustment, that it's always his problem, because it's not. But we need also to learn how we can adapt what we're doing now so that it better fits his style of learning and what he needs.

MERROW: You say 54 schools and, let's see, there are roughly 180 days in a school year. So, maybe each school could demand three and a half days of your time a year -- is that right?

JOHNSON: Theoretically, yes. And, of course, this is entirely voluntary on the teacher's part. I can give advice until it comes

out on and on and on. But unless it's taken and something's done with it, then you might as well not bother.

MERROW: But you're not called in to help identify gifted kids. You're called in to deal with and help solve problems that arise.

JOHNSON: Yes. Formal identification as such usually takes place when we put a program into a school. And this, of course, does mean going through the testing that's been done on the children, teacher nomination, parent questionnaires, things of this sort, all the information sources. But this is not done yet for a school district as whole.

MERROW: How many kids are in the Shawnee Mission school system?

JOHNSON: The last count, I believe, there were like 47,500.

MERROW: So, if we just said there were 50,000 kids, there would by some mathematical figuring be 1500 gifted kids, if we say three percent?

JOHNSON: Yes.

MERROW: How many gifted kids are identified in the Shawnee Mission public schools?

JOHNSON: There are 38 elementary children now on my itinerate list. We have the diagnostic teams working on identifying children for two more schools, which will bring the total up to probably about ninety. And our percentage, from what we can tell on the two schools we're into now with identification, runs much higher than three. It's been more like six or seven percent.

MERROW: So, that if you're reaching ninety at the most, ninety out of at least 1500 if the three percent national figure holds up -- but in any case, you're identifying a bare fraction of the gifted kids, and you're not providing services for them, unless you're called in to help deal with the problem.

JOHNSON: Yes.

MERROW: Shawnee Mission is just kind of sticking its toe into the water.

JOHNSON: Yes.

MERROW: Miss Johnson, describe for me, if you will, the reaction you find when you go into a school system. How do the teachers react to the notion of your new-fangled idea that you ought to have some kind of program for gifted kids?

JOHNSON: Some teachers really, I believe, already think they're doing everything necessary for the gifted, this being the idea that they're going to survive, no matter what. You know, they're gifted, so there's no problem. I fear, by far, most of them in many cases don't survive with what we do to them in the schools.

Sometimes the administrators, this being principals and those on the first line of fire, are a little leery about what the parent reaction is going to be, feeling that they're going to be storming the gates wanting their children in the program.

MERROW: Wait a minute. I don't understand that. You say, you don't want parents storming the gates, trying to get their kids in advanced programs?

JOHNSON: With one person full time and two people part time, we can't handle too many yet.

MERROW: So, you're part of the problem. You're saying, don't bother us. You're hoping the parents won't bother you with the thought their kids might be gifted.

JOHNSON: Not really. I guess it's simply demanding something of us that we're not ready and set up to do yet.

MERROW: Miss Charmaine Johnson, who's an itinerant teacher of the Shawnee Mission Schools in Kansas.

BLAIR: So, if Dr. James Curry has stated an ideal of one-to-one, Charmaine Johnson describes what's really going on in most places.

MERROW: Another problem mentioned more than once is hostility on the part of teachers, sometimes toward gifted children who may be brighter than the teacher or may disturb the class, and sometimes directed at the traveling teacher who comes by to help the gifted children.

BLAIR: "You're taking my best student" is a familiar lament.

Another traveling teacher, Sue Novotny, works with 19 schools in rural Yuma County, Arizona. She tells John how to adjust to teacher hostility and limited resources.

SUE NOVOTNY

SUE NOVOTNY: I go to a school called Dateland School, and it's a very interesting school. It's very hot in Arizona, and it's desert. This school is right in the middle of the desert. And it's sort of unique, in that the kids and I have been doing some desert survival kinds of things. And like I did this egg carton fantasy with a group of my students.

MERROW: You did what?

NOVOTNY: Egg carton fantasy.

MERROW: Explain.

NOVOTNY: What you do is you give twelve individuals a number of eggs in an egg carton, and you have a stimulus of an egg carton there that you show the twelve individuals. And you arrange the chairs so that it looks like an egg carton -- the knees of the people are touching, their sides are touching. And you ask them to close their eyes. This is a kind of a feeling, a kind of creativity thing. It calls for someone to give you answers that are hopefully unusual. You're an egg inside this carton inside a refrigerator -- how do you feel being an egg inside this carton inside the refrigerator? You go around the egg carton and just keep talking egg carton talk, like what are some of the things you're experiencing? A kid would say, "I don't smell anything, because the lady who owns this refrigerator uses Arm & Hammer baking soda. Or some kid will say, "Oh, I smell Bermuda onions."

There are different kinds of answers, you know, like old stale cheese, and things like this. I had one student that was sitting there, and she was rocking back and forth in her chair, you know. She's really getting into the activity. I was very pleased. And I said, "Okay, Lucy, what are some of the things you're feeling?" And she said, "Oh, I'm really dizzy." And I said, "Well, why?" And she says, "Well, I'm on the door of this refrigerator, and there's a lot of kids living in this house. They keep opening and closing the door, and the inside of me is getting all jumbled up." And just things like that, getting responses, getting the kids to become something that they're not. I ask questions like, "Okay, what are your aspirations -- what do you want to be used as as an egg?" You know, an omelette, painted red, white and blue and thrown at somebody for the Bicentennial, different kinds of answers.

This is just like a creative little exercise. They love it. They really get into it. Some kids do, some kids don't. They're not used to this kind of having them channeled into this mode of thinking. It's fun, and you try to do these things with the kids. And then they'll go a couple of weeks later, "Oh, let's be eggs again." Okay, then I'll say something like, "Let's be items in a lady's purse -- what are you going to be -- and tell me about yourself." Or, "Let's be balls in a university equipment room, you know, what kind of ball are you? How was your day today?" You know, I was a tennis ball, and I was whacked all over the tennis court, these kinds of things.

So, I did this activity with some fourth graders. There were only two or three, and a couple of eighth graders. And I handed out the activity to all of the teachers, and it came back the next three weeks. And in my box were responses. One teacher said he tried it with his classroom, and he wrote down all the responses. And he was very pleased. So, this is the kind of feedback I look for in teachers. Is this worthwhile? Are the teachers picking up on it? Are they doing it in their classrooms? You can do these activities with regular classroom kids. You just get different kinds of responses. You take it to different kinds of levels. They might take it and run or they might say, okay, that was a nice activity -- what else are we going to do?

I find sometimes that teachers think that I'm an entertainer more or less, and I come in with these new ideas and I do them for them, and they don't really have to do anything. But it's getting them to think of new ideas and things to employ in a classroom. You know, I'm there for their benefit and for the gifted child's benefit, but I try to do everything I can for all the people that I'm involved with.

MERROW: It's a real leap in imagination to pretend you're an egg in the refrigerator when you're sitting in the middle of the desert in Arizona.

NOVOTNY: Yes it is.

MERROW: I wonder, as you talk, Miss Novotny, if, as you said, a lot of things are applicable to just any kid -- any kid would have a good time pretending to be an egg in an egg carton, and if maybe a whole different attitude toward education would help us accept the idea of treating gifted kids differently. That is, if we tried to treat all kids differently and not regiment them to the

extent that schools really do - maybe that would trickle up, if you will, so we'd have a healthier policy toward gifted kids?

NOVOTNY: I agree. That sounds very good. And my attitude is that you're there for all the children involved - all the kids in the school. And it's like - you set examples - and you do these things. They're fun. Sure. But a lot of them involve hard work, and it involves the teacher going - the teacher actually doing something. I find a lot of the teachers, especially in the rural schools to which I go, are stagnant. They've been there. They might take a course every once in a while, but being stagnant, too, you're just very closed to new ideas and things. And I feel sorry for the students sometimes. I wish I had contact with a lot more students than I do; and more students who are just gifted because when I give the teachers these activities, sometimes they just get thrown away. You know, they go from the mailbox to the trash can which is, oh, I don't know . . .

MERROW: Depressing.

NOVOTNY: Yeah. Well, you wonder what the work is for. But, then you try again.

MERROW: Sue Novotny, who works with gifted kids in Yuma, Arizona.

BLAIR: Sue Novotny is a gifted adult identified by an I.Q. test when she was in elementary school. Now, she is repaying the favor; and, she says, having a lot of fun at the same time.

(MUSIC - "Much More")

BLAIR: There are many hurdles facing gifted children and it may be that gifted girls have an even tougher row to hoe than gifted boys. Pianist Susanna Starr, who at 6 was the youngest soloist ever to perform with the Philadelphia Orchestra, talked about herself with NPR reporter, Robert Nathan, in New York.

SUSANNA STARR

SUSANNA STARR: I liked the approval. I was not very attractive as a child. I was fat and clumsy and I didn't have too many friends; and the other kids sort of resented my talent. I was taken out of public school when I was ten and I had private tutoring. But up until that time, my greatest source of approval came from audiences -- not from my peers. I guess that was my biggest comfort. Probably when I was in my later teens, I began to wonder whether I would have been accepted as a person without any talent. I guess sometimes I even think about that now, but when one knows that he or she is really good at something, it's very hard to not envision yourself doing that thing later on. I remember once hearing a pianist complain bitterly about, oh, the trials and tribulations of the life of an artist. I said, "Well, why are you doing it?" And he said, "Well, what else could I do? That's all I know."

The only tough thing for me, after being a child prodigy, was knowing that when I was six that I was the best six-year-old around; that when I was ten, I was the best ten-year-old around; and, by the time I was fifteen, there were a couple of people catching up; and by the time I was eighteen, there were plenty of people who could play the same things I could play. It wasn't all that different. The difference was artistic interpretation.

(PIANO MUSIC)

NATHAN: Women in the arts have not always had the easiest time, I think, particularly the visual arts where women have often been ignored. Do you think being a woman has affected your career negatively? Did you find any opposition to your career as a concert pianist because of that?

STARR: I think that the answer has to definitely be yes, and I still think it s being affected now. It's in such a subtle way that you can't point to any one thing. But I have never found that any form of discrimination or difficulty came between me and an audience. And I never felt that I was not accepted as an artist or not taken seriously once someone heard me. I think that the biggest difficulty has been in getting the engagement to begin with. The people on the fringes of music, not the musicians and not the concert-goers, but the people who are in the music business.

NATHAN: You think they don't take you seriously?

STARR: I think they tend not to - particularly when women are young. I think when women are older and they see that they are still keeping at it, then I think after a while, they take women more seriously. I think you'll notice that most of your famous women artists are over forty and I think there has to be some reason for that. The only thing I can come up with is that maybe after forty, they are no longer thought of as a sex object.

(PIANO MUSIC)

MERROW: Pianist Susanna Starr talking with reporter Robert Nathan. Educators are expanding the idea of giftedness beyond the intellectual into the creative and performing arts.

BLAIR: But, you don't have to be a concert pianist or an artist to be creatively gifted, of course. Dr. Donald Treffinger, of the University of Kansas, explains how many different kinds of creativity there are.

DR. DONALD TREFFINGER

DR. DONALD TREFFINGER: I think what's happened is our whole concept of giftedness is changing. One of the most important reasons is that we are better understanding the nature of human intelligence -- the breadth and the complexity of human intelligence. We are finding that there are many more ways for kids to function intelligently than merely those ways that are reflected in traditional academic kinds of performances or on traditional kinds of I.Q. tests like you and I probably took when we were in school. So, as we expand that concept of what giftedness is, we very quickly come into the arena where creative talent is employed. We restrict our view of creativity solely to the arts which is certainly a valid, and probably what the layman most has in mind when he thinks about creative, but, it's not the only expression of creativity. Creativity can express itself in the way one solves any kind of a problem. You know, what do you do when you come up to a situation that you've never encountered before? How do you make it work? Another kind of thing is in the area of leadership, of course, and working with other people. It may be in more formal kinds of scientific inquiry or in the research process which, I suppose, is an extension of the problem-solving domain.

It could be in any area - I suppose we might say in any worthwhile human endeavor - there is an opportunity to be original - to think of something new - and to use that in a new way - to use one's ideas in a new way. There are lots of different techniques that we try to encourage kids to use and to develop to keep in mind possibilities, to look for new possibilities. It is not a matter of going back to page 19 and looking it up in the book and remembering what your teacher told you. Being able to suspend your evaluation - the principal of deferred judgment - so that you can open your mind up to lots of possibilities. Looking for and using analogies - how would I respond if I were something else? Taking a situation that is not true and assuming that it is true and saying what would the implications of that be? Using some kind of direct analogy from nature - what I need to solve this problem is a snake to get in my car. Well, what could a snake do that I can't do with my arm and if I don't have a snake handy, how can I use something else to accomplish that same purpose? Being able to play with ideas and turn them around and look at them from a new point of view - these are all things we can encourage and improve in children and in adolescence; and, there's evidence, even in adults.

MERROW: But, right now, the creatively gifted are the ones who are neglected.

TREFFINGER: Yes, the traditional education program has focused primarily on the academically gifted individual. While those abilities are certainly valid - they are certainly important - we are discovering that they are not the only abilities that people possess.

MERROW: What happens when you neglect creative people. I mean, does something different happen when you neglect creative people than if you neglect academically gifted people?

TREFFINGER: Something different? No, the process of rust is about the same, I support. I guess one thing is that they become devious. If they don't have constructive ways for that creativity to expand and be expressed, they will find unconstructive ways.

MERROW: That could be destructive ways.

TREFFINGER: Yes. The imaginative villain in the classroom - the kid who is disruptive, argumentative and the show-off kind of kid. It could be that these are signs of creativity being thwarted and redirected.

MERROW: You mean, it won't be denied. It will just be thwarted and diverted.

TREFFINGER: That very commonly occurs. In some cases, of course, it is thwarted and inhibited and stifled. It is impossible for us to assess the magnitude of the loss. I think, really, this gets us into one of the most important goals that I think is inherently related to creativity. It is not just thinking up lots of possibilities. It is knowing what to do with those possibilities when you have them and it is being able to act independently with those possibilities. I believe very strongly that education should be importantly concerned with what happens to children when the school building and the teachers are no longer there; that we ought to be concerned with making kids more autonomous - more independent in their thought and in their judgment.

We should help them to learn to become better able to manage and direct their own learning - to know how to respond in many different situations - and to be their own governors.

MERROW: You're not just talking about gifted children now. You're talking about all children.

TREFFINGER: No, I think all children should. With the gifted child we face the interesting situation that even very traditionally viewed, even if we view the gifted child only in terms of, let's say, I.Q. 130 or above, characteristically this child comes to the school setting with a great deal of autonomy and independence with confidence in his own abilities or her own abilities with confidence in her own judgment -- the ability to say I trust what I think when I look at a problem and work through and consider alternatives. I have confidence that what I'm going to come out with is going to be a reasonable, creditable, plausible solution. I don't necessarily have to have someone handing me an M&M saying, good boy, good girl, that was a right answer.

So, these kind of children come prepared for a more autonomous, a more involving approach to learning that takes well beyond just stuffing in lots of facts and regurgitating them.

MERROW: So, you're saying, if the schools could accept the notion that all kids could be moved toward autonomy, then schools would be better able to cope with gifted kids who come in that way, predisposed to be that way, or already that way.

TREFFINGER: Yes. And I think it would also improve the way we serve children. If schools could adapt to the unique needs and the characteristics of every child who comes to them, there would really be no need for special programs for the gifted as some category, because every kid would become his own special population of size one.

So, I think really what we have to learn is that the most effective kind of instruction is one that starts out by looking at the characteristics of an individual child that starts out looking at the different kinds of thinking and feeling processes that people use, that people can use, and that gives opportunities for learners to be using and developing a variety of different kinds of processes.

Now, the implication of that becomes that you very well could have a classroom in which there is seldom a whole class doing the same thing at the same time and where frequently there will be children doing things completely unique at any one time. Many times when perhaps every child in the room is working on something different.

Now, conversely, I don't want a group of hermits. Some people think that individualized instruction is learning alone. That doesn't always have to be. But you see, what I'm trying to make a case for is that we need to vary the size of the group, the kind of content the kids are working on, and the kinds of thinking processes that are going on. It's a function of the needs and the interests of the kids.

MERROW: One of the things that bothers me as I talk to people who are working in gifted education is this continual downgrading of the normal experience in school. It seems to me that the charge

often is that the notion of gifted education is an elitist notion. It is an elitist notion, but you folks seem to me to spend a great deal of your time and energy talking about how awful the normal experience is in schools.

TREFFINGER: Let me comment on this elitist notion idea first. The Kettering Foundation produced a film in which they made a comment that says it, I think, very succinctly. They said nothing is more unequal than the equal treatment of unequals.

MERROW: Mindless egalitarianism.

TREFFINGER: Yes. So, recognizing those differences and responding to those differences effectively is not undemocratic.

MERROW: Okay, now, but you're recognizing differences, and what you're doing is instead of promoting giftedness, you're downgrading the normal experience. In other words, you're saying that that teacher was a mindless idiot, etc.,etc. Schools are pedestrian, etc., etc. How do you expect anybody to support gifted education if you tell all of us out here that we're a bunch of idiots?

TREFFINGER: Certainly, I don't know any teachers who do bad things to kids deliberately. I start from the premise that every teacher is out in the world there, not in my university classroom, but in her classroom, day by day, trying to do the best damn thing she can do for kids all day long. But most teachers do not have the kinds of training that they need to recognize the unique characteristics of gifted or talented or highly-creative children. Many times, they find those kids kind of threatening personally. They find a lack of resources in the regular classroom setting to meet with those kids. They feel very frustrated about that. They don't need me to tell them that they aren't doing everything they could be doing for gifted kids. They already know that.

BLAIR: Dr. Donald Treffinger, Educational Psychologist at the University of Kansas. He used the term deviant to describe some gifted kids and despite usual connotations of that word, there is the notion of the desirable deviant, that is, it is good to deviate from the norm sometimes, helping all of us to see things in a new light.

(MUSIC)

MERROW: Individualization of instruction and autonomy may be the best goals for education, but structure in the classroom is essential for some gifted children.

BLAIR: Disadvantaged gifted children may be missed by the usual identification methods -- I.Q. tests, and so forth, and may not need the same things as other children. Here's Dr. Harold Lyon, Head of the Office of Gifted and Talented in the U.S. Office of Education, talking with Connie Goldman.

DR. HAROLD LYON

DR. HAROLD LYON: I'd like to point out that there are just as many gifted youngsters in the ghettos and in the barrios of this country and on the Indian reservations as there are in the suburbs, yet there is this common notion around the country that they're an

elite middle-class group. Well, the fact is that the middle-class youngsters do show up on the I.Q. tests quite readily. They have good verbal skills which is one of the primary prerequisites to show up highly on the I.Q. tests. Those tests do discriminate against those with low verbal skills, minority group people and people from disadvantaged backgrounds, who frequently don't have the verbal skills to show up.

We're investing in research on identification of gifted youngsters, and research is one of our four national objectives. And in this research we've been encouraged by some of the work done by people like Paul Torrance at the University of Georgia, who's working with Black gifted youngsters. And he's found the highest correlation between a good sense of humor and giftedness among Black youngsters. He's also found that Black youngsters are better at identifying their own gifted peers than are teachers. Teachers miss fifty percent usually.

We've just funded a project to identify Chicano gifted youngsters at the Southwest Educational Laboratory where we find a whole different set of criteria rising. For Chicanos, leadership emerges as a prime indicator of giftedness. The youngster is sort of selected by his peers as a leader -- we find those youngsters are extremely gifted. And this is true in other groups in other populations as well.

GOLDMAN: It seems to be an impossible challenge for a teacher to work with a gifted child. There is no one kind of gifted child. How does a teacher serve the needs of a particular child like this? They certainly can't have all the skills and talents that the child has a potential for.

LYON: That's certainly true, and I think a lot of it goes back to the difference between what I call status authority and natural authority. A teacher who has status authority stands behind her podium and lectures down to this inferior group of people who she is going to fill up with her superior knowledge, or even worse, she lectures at the back corner of the classroom without even looking at a youngster.

The teacher who has what I would call natural authority teaches by sharing in a learning experience with a group of colleagues, bringing in all of her resources, her experiences, her feelings, her books, her friends. And it's students in the classroom who are the most unique resource of all. In any subject you may be discussing there's some youngster who has a unique experience, a unique bit of knowledge to share with the others, if a teacher can facilitate that.

If you look up in a dictionary, to teach is defined to make to know, and I don't want to make anyone know something, but if you can facilitate the discovery, then you have not just one teacher who has to be perfect and who has to have all the answers, like many of our teacher training institutions try instill in teachers. But then you have a human being who has strengths and weaknesses, and who can share with these other human beings who are unique individuals. The best teachers have been dealing with youngsters as unique human beings for hundreds of years, the best teachers, and they're rare.

We realize maybe five to fifteen percent of our potential in our lifetime, a tragic waste of our untapped potential for the

gifted youngster or for any youngster. To the degree that we have a rote, fixed set of responses to things in life, we limit our potential to just a sliver of what it would be otherwise. To the degree that we can be spontaneous right here and now reacting to things without this fixed set of responses, we have almost a hundred percent of our potential available. The teacher that can be spontaneous, that can allow youngsters the freedom to be spontaneous is the learning facilitator I talked about.

This kind of teacher, and we have some imperical evidence now to show that this is true -- there are several traits we found to be effective that Carl Rogers in his research and others have found. When the teacher or learning facilitator is a real genuine person, they're transparent, they're themselves, they're not some shell, they're not playing a role. That's one of the important traits that imperical research shows makes an effective learning facilitator. And much more learning takes place.

The second one is what we call empathetic understanding. And the teacher can put herself into the student or into the other person.

And the third one is when a teacher can prize another individual, genuinely care about them. These three traits in a learning facilitator not only work in terms of having the student learn more, but the teacher gains a lot more from it. These are the same traits that Carl Rogers found to be most successful in the therapists working with patients. And he's done research now to show this is true in education as well.

The uniqueness of the individual, I think, is well brought out in the statement that Carl Rogers likes to quote. He says "if you look at a sunset, nobody says a sunset should be changed this way or that way -- no one says we need a little more orange in the cloud cover, a little more pink in the right hand side, but instead we allow a sunset to evolve and grow. And if we could treat our gifted youngsters the way we treat a sunset, allowing their uniqueness to evolve, bringing all of our resources and sharing with them, but celebrating their own uniqueness, and that's my fantasy of what humanistic education for the gifted and talented might be like."

BLAIR: Dr. Harold Lyon of the U.S. Office of Education speaking with Reporter Connie Goldman.

DR. RUDY POHL

DR. RUDY POHL: Use love as a behavior modifier. Respect the child, accept him, and encourage him. This is the most effective means for helping a child develop today.

BLAIR: Dr. Rudy Pohl, Editor of a journal about gifted education. We think you'll enjoy his mnemonic device for remembering the characteristics of gifted students -- MICE PS.

POHL: M for memory. These youngsters have remarkable memories. They remember precise details. They recall many things that happened many years previously.

I for interests. They have intensive and extensive interests, wide ranging. There's almost a romance at a very early age. They

fall in love with learning, with some aspect like dinosaurs. They have an insatiable curiosity.

C is for curiosity. They want to know the why and the how of things, not just facts, but why did it get that way and how did it get that way. And, of course, luckily they have the energy --

E for energy -- an abundance of this mental energy in order to pursue their interests. They tend to focus on problem solving.

P for problem solving. They often will come up with unique and unusual solutions to these problems.

S -- and then S, they have a sense of self. They're themselves, even while participating in group activities.

So, if you can remember MICE PS, you can remember how to find these youngsters, but in order to find them we do have to get away from the idea of keeping youngsters within the average range. We have to allow for diversity of talent within any group of human beings.

BLAIR: Dr. Rudy Pohl, Editor of Gifted and Talented, a Connecticut journal.

MERROW: Last week we asked you to write us about programs for gifted students in your schools. We thank you for your responses. Keep them coming, and we'll read some examples on the last program in the series. Send them to National Public Radio - Dash - Education, Washington, D.C. 20036.

BLAIR: And we've got a deal for you. Answer our question: Does your school have a program for the gifted? And we'll set you a free set of transcripts of this five part series on gifted and talented children. Our address again: National Public Radio - dash - Education, Washington, D.C. 20036. A set of five cassettes costs $16.

MERROW: This special series is made possible by a grant from the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation.

BLAIR: Reports for this program were provided by Connie Goldman in St. Paul, Minnesota and Robet Nathan in New York.

MERROW: Next week in Part Four of the series, we'll talk with parents of gifted children about the special problems that arise. Join us.

(MUSIC)

CHILD: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a co-production of the Institute for Educational Leadership at the George Washington University and National Public Radio.

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